

Sherman Landers

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Although most people view Michael Jordan as Illinois' greatest living sports star, his accomplishments are actually rivaled by those of the little known Oregon High School track star, Sherman Landers. Sherman Landers was born around the turn of the twentieth century in Oregon (c. 1898-1900) to Ziba and Harriet (Spickerman) Landers. Sherman and his teammate, Frank Loomis, traveled all over the Midwest in 1916 winning track meets and breaking long-standing track records. Landers attended the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia where he lived his entire adult life. He later married, and he and his wife, Marian, had two daughters, Sally and Lucy. Landers became a very "wealthy financial entrepreneur," However, he is most memorable for his incredible athletic feats.

The first major track meet of Sherman's senior year was the Bradley Polytechnic interscholastic meet in Peoria, Illinois on April 22, 1916. Landers set records in the 50 and 100 yard dash, as well as, the pole vault and broad jump. He also received a second in the low hurdles. Loomis added three firsts and the two-man team bested the other 325 athletes by a large margin. The final team score was, Oregon 43, Kewaunee, 13.

The next important meet in which Landers and Loomis participated in was at the University of Minnesota on May 27, 1916. This was to be one of Landers' greatest track accomplishments. He received firsts in the pole vault, the 100 yard dash, the 220 yard dash, and the 120 yard high hurdles. It was this meet in which he set a new world record in the pole vault with a height of 12 feet 8 inches. Compared with today's standards, this height may not seem that impressive, but with the equipment of the time, it was a great accomplishment. Some believe that Landers was so good in the pole vault event because he was able to practice in any type of weather by pole

vaulting inside the Fouch Feed Shed in Oregon. Loomis also had a career meet at the University of Minnesota. He received a first in the 220 yard low hurdles in a time of 24.25 seconds, which tied the world record.

One of the last meets on the Oregon track schedule took place at the University of Chicago on June 10, 1916. Landers placed first in the 100 yard dash, the 220 yard dash, and the pole vault. He also received two seconds and one third, which amounted to 26 team points. With Landers performance alone, Oregon would have won the meet handily. However, Loomis added another 11 points by placing a first and two thirds. Although neither Landers or Loomis' times and distances were spectacular because of unfavorable weather, they were still able to top 600 of the best prep athletes from across the nation with the next closest team being Urbana with 15 points. After high school Landers continued to compete in track and field.

Sherman Landers was nominated for the 1916 Olympic team, but due to the onset of World War I, the games were cancelled. However, in 1920, Landers was again nominated for the Olympics in Antwerp, Belgium, where he placed fifth in the triple jump. It may seem surprising that he did not participate in the pole vault, but when asked why he didn't participate; his response was only "that it was a long story." There were only a handful of times when Sherman came back to Oregon after his high school career, and one of those times was in the mid 1970s when the school board allowed the Oregon High school track to be renamed Landers-Loomis Field. Another trip to Oregon was in 1983, when Sherman, accompanied by his daughter, Sally, was the parade marshal of the Harvest Time Parade in Oregon.

Landers is a great source of pride for Oregon. His incredible feats, both during and after high school, still amaze many people. Although Sherman Landers may sometimes be overlooked by more recent athletic stars, his athletic talents equal, if not surpass, those of many of today's

athletes. [From Bicentennial History of Ogle County; “World Championship Won by Landers and Loomis in Chicago,” Chicago Tribune, June 11, 1916; Peoria Journal, June 11, 1916; *Record of the World’s Champion Interscholastic Track Team*; *The Story of Oregon, Illinois*; student historian’s interview with Art Carlson, Sept. 23, 2003; student historian’s interview with Betty Landers, Sept. 22, 2003.]